



A Humvee rolls off the fast sealift ship USNS Seay at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. All of U.S. Pacific Command's surface-transportation needs are managed by the Hawaii-based 599th Transportation Group.

Terri Kojima



PACOM's Movement Masters

Story by Steve Harding



"In a sense, we are the '911' solution to any surface transportation or deployment requirement in the Pacific theater. That's what it all comes down to."



If you had to pick one word to describe U.S. Pacific Command's area of responsibility, it would probably be "vast." The Honolulu-based joint command's AOR spans 10 time zones, 43 countries and more than 105 million square miles from Hawaii to the east coast of Africa.

And if you had to pick a second word to describe the organization that manages all of PACOM's surface-

transportation needs, it would definitely be "small." The unit — the 599th Transportation Group — performs its challenging mission with just 213 full-time people.

Part of the Army's Military Traffic Management Command, the 599th is headquartered at Wheeler Army Airfield, Hawaii. It has three forward-based transportation battalions — the 835th on Okinawa; the 836th in Yokohama, Japan; and the 837th in Pusan, South Korea — and small, specialized offices at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and on Guam. In total, the 599th consists of just 14 officers, 20 enlisted soldiers, 80 Department of the

SGT Lisa Carpenter of the 599th's Okinawa-based 835th Trans. Bn. scans a container filled with Marine Corps cargo bound for a training area in northern Australia.





Army civilians and 99 host-nation employees.

“We’re a very small organization with a very big mission,” said COL Peter J. Gitto, the group’s commander at the time of Soldiers’ visit.

“When PACOM has big, heavy things that need to be moved — whether for a deployment or an exercise — we make the arrangements and then execute the movement,” Gitto said. “As PACOM’s single-port manager we prioritize seaport workloads, maintain in-transit visibility of cargo and select ports, operating from both our fixed installations and deployed locations. We also provide such related ocean services as container management and cargo booking aboard commercial vessels.”

Specialized Teams...

One way the 599th works to support PACOM’s far-flung activities

▲ The 599th has three transportation battalions — the 835th on Okinawa; the 836th in Yokohama, Japan (seen above); and the 837th in Pusan, South Korea — and small, specialized offices at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and on Guam.

▶ Members of the 599th go wherever necessary to aid in the loading and unloading of vital cargo. Here, unit members discuss the offloading of the containership *Maersk Constellation* in Brisbane, Australia, with the ship’s chief officer.





▲ Aviation maintainers begin to reassemble AH-64 Apaches shipped to Korea under the supervision of the 599th's 837th Transportation Battalion. The shipment of high-tech equipment is routine for the 599th and its subordinate units.

is through Deployment Support Teams.

Made up of small groups of soldiers and civilians drawn from throughout the larger organization, the DSTs are task-organized to support individual operations. Team members manage, document and synchronize the movement of cargo through the ports where they're assigned, and may deploy for up to several months at a time. DSTs from the 599th have most recently deployed to the Philippines, Korea, Thailand, Kuwait, the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia and ports in Europe.

Working in a remote location for months at a time can be challenging, said civilian traffic-management specialist John Fisher, especially

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when the DST deploys to a potentially hazardous area.

"The DST members — both military and civilian — may be required to carry weapons in certain areas, and that can really add an additional challenge," said Fisher, whose most recent DST mission took him to Subic Bay in the Philippines in support of Exercise Balikatan '03. "But on the other hand it's also enjoyable to go to different places and meet new people."

"It also helps that the unit makes sure that we are fully prepared for whatever the mission requires," added Samuel Ames, another of the 599th's civilian traffic-management specialists. "We are well trained to do the job, and the unit makes sure we have the best equipment possible — everything





Mark S. Rice



Don Larkin

▲ The 599th's SGM Gonzalo Rivera Jr. directs a vehicle onto a sealift ship following Exercise Cobra Gold in Thailand. Unit members travel throughout PAC-OM's AOR to manage cargo movements.

we need to do the job.”

Among the things that help the DSTs work more effectively wherever they are is state-of-the-art communications equipment, Gitto said.

“The thing that really ties us all together and allows us to keep in touch is our ability to communicate,” Gitto said. “Our comm systems are all configured in ‘fly-away’ packages that our DSTs can take with them. Each package supports both secure and nonsecure communications, and really ensures that we all know what’s going on in each of the remote locations — a necessity for command and control.”

≡ ...And Special People

Much of the 599th's success in its widely scattered operations is due to the creativity and initiative of its diverse and professional workforce,



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unit members agree.

“It’s all about professionalism and individual initiative,” Gitto said. “Take our young officers, for example. When they’re in command of a DST in a remote area, they have to be

▲ The 599th routinely supports deployments by the Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division. One of the unit's OH-58D Kiowas is seen here after returning to Honolulu from a deployment to Bosnia.



▲ Tracking the movement of cargo is made easier through the use of bar codes. Here, SGT Norberto Lucio of the 837th Trans. Bn. scans data during an offload in Gladstone, Australia.

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able to make decisions quickly and accurately, without guidance from higher headquarters. They need to be innovative and creative, and the experience they gain on each operation is extremely valuable during successive deployments.”

The same experience and professionalism is found in the 599th’s enlisted soldiers, said group SGM Gonzalo Rivera.

“We are very fortunate in that we have a lot of quality soldiers who have a great deal of experience and knowledge,” he said. “We have no junior enlisted soldiers assigned to

us; all are NCOs with anywhere from 10 to 18 years of experience. All that training, education and experience is extremely valuable in what we do.”

In many ways, Gitto said, the 599th’s civilians are the backbone of the organization.

“Our DA civilians provide a tremendously valuable continuity for the organization through their experience and their ability to pass that experience on to our military people,” he said. “And our emergency-essential civilians, who train and deploy side by side with our

military people, are absolutely indispensable. So are our host-nation employees, who provide a great deal of cultural expertise and bring a great deal of loyalty and dedication to the job.”

Given the vastness of the 599th’s AOR, Rivera said one of his biggest challenges is ensuring that all of the unit’s members are trained to the same level of competence.

“Because we deploy as task-organized elements, we pull the people we need from throughout the organization,” Rivera said. “That allows us to avoid depleting the resources of any one battalion, while ensuring that we spread the training and mission opportunities throughout the group. But it also means that for the DST commanders to feel confident that whomever is assigned to their team is trained to the same standard, we all have to train to that standard for both individual and collective tasks.”

≡ It's All About Force Projection

The ultimate reason for all that the 599th and its people do, Gitto said, is force projection.

“An important element of our national strategy is the ability to quickly and effectively project our combat power — both people and equipment — wherever it’s needed,” he said. “And the way we project that force is by air and surface deployment. Since most of our nation’s forces are deployed by sea — especially in PACOM’s AOR — without a unit like this to prepare and deploy units, our national strategy is lacking.

“In a very real sense, the single most important element that the 599th provides is what we call ‘in-transit visibility,’” Gitto added. “That means we are always able to tell the warfighters where their force is and when they can expect its arrival where they need it to be.”

“In a sense,” Rivera added, “we are the ‘911’ solution to any surface transportation or deployment requirement in the Pacific theater. That’s what it all comes down to.”

